FORWARD MOVEMENT LECTURES

Brooke Herford

The Forward Movement in Religious Thought

as interpreted by Unitarians

FIVE LECTURES

BY

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THESE LECTURES—WHICH WERE DELIVERED AS THE AUTHOR'S PART IN A GENERAL COURSE OF SIMULTANEOUS LECTURES ON THE SAME SUBJECTS GIVEN IN THE UNITARIAN CHURCHES THROUGHOUT LONDON—ARE PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF SOME WHO HEARD THEM.

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INTRODUCTORY.

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF UNITARIANISM.

UNITARIANISM has been a good deal spoken of, of late, but not many people seem to know what it really is. Many have an idea that it is a dreadful kind of infidelity, to be shunned as wicked and dangerous. Yet they know that in public life Unitarians are among the most respected and reliable men; and certainly some of those who have stood before the world as Unitarians—such ministers as Dr. Channing, John Hamilton Thom, and Dr. Martineau, such writers as Oliver Wendell Holmes, the poet H. W. Longfellow, the eminent physiologist Dr. W. B. Carpenter, and his equally eminent sister, Mary Carpenter—have been of a deeply thoughtful and religious spirit. So the question is beginning to be widely asked:

What is Unitarianism?

The briefest answer is, that it is that form of Christianity which holds to the primitive faith in the simple Unity of God,—that *God* is One, not a Trinity; and which looks upon *Jesus Christ* as the greatest and holiest of Teachers, but not God. Around this great central position have commonly grouped themselves

some other beliefs of hardly less importance. Thus Unitarians regard *Man* as the child of God—not "fallen" and totally depraved, but only slowly rising; *Salvation*, as deliverance from sin, including everything that heals and helps man towards goodness and God; *Heaven* and *Hell*—not separate worlds, but what men make of their own lives, both in this world and the world to come, while in no world can man ever go beyond the love and goodness of God. Unitarians, also, while reverencing the *Bible* as the text-book of religion, have always regarded it (and in this they no longer stand alone, for the more thoughtful scholars in all Churches are now taking much the same ground) as the records of God's gradual revelation of his truth and will,—but human records, to be studied with perfect freedom in order to distinguish the Divine from the merely human.

This is the common position of Unitarians. This is their general way of looking at the subject of religion. But while there is quite as much agreement among them as among the members of any other group of churches,

Unitarians have no Formal Creed.

They do not shape these beliefs into any set authoritative form which must be accepted either by churches or individuals, but urge upon all to think for themselves, and leave their churches entirely open to the reception of new truth.

A question often asked is,

When and how did Unitarianism arise?

In reality, it would be more historically correct to speak of *the rise* of "Trinitarianism." Because that was the thing which rose, while Unitarianism was what was there before. Unitarianism is as old as the Hebrew Lawgiver

who said: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."[1] Christian Unitarianism is as old as Christ, who simply reaffirmed that grand truth, only with a tenderer light upon the thought of that One Infinite Being. Christ's own teaching was simply that of *One God, our Heavenly Father*, for keeping to which we have got the name Unitarians. And the Christianity which the Apostles preached was still the same: One Almighty God; and Jesus Christ, not a God to be worshipped, but a divinely-prepared teacher to be loved and followed. But then gradually came the change. The gospel went forth among heathen peoples. These were quite used to the idea of gods descending to earth in the form of men. So it came quite naturally to them to think that this great Christ must have been such a god, though at first they regarded him as only a created and subordinate god. Once exalted into God, at all, however, the tendency was to exalt him towards equality with the Supreme Deity. Then, by a similar tendency, the "Holy Spirit"—really, the Divine influence, God Himself working in man's heart—came also to be thought of as a distinct Divine person. And so the spirit of abstruse speculation took men further and further from the simplicity of Christ until at last—but it was not until three hundred years after Christ—a Trinitarian Creed was arrived at, and finally proclaimed as the authoritative religion of the Christian Church. This was the rise of Trinitarianism.

And yet it must not be thought that the older, *original* Christianity gave in without long and repeated struggle. From the first there were those who resisted these tendencies to make Christ into a God, and especially the later attempt to make him equal to the Supreme Being. Best known of these are the *Arians*, who in the fourth century constituted nearly half Christendom, and who for centuries after, though declared heretics, still

[1] *Deut.* vi. 4; the Revised Version, in the margin.

kept up their protest against this doctrine which had changed Jesus of Nazareth into Almighty God. But the tide was too strong. More and more, the centre of the Church came to be Rome, and gradually *Arianism* was crushed out everywhere, and *Trinitarianism* seemed finally to have usurped the place of the simple Christianity of Christ.

Unitarianism at the Reformation.

It was many centuries before that simple, original Christianity began to rise again. But at last came the great Reformation. That set the mind of Europe free; and among the very earliest movements of that great epoch, were some which gave birth to our Modern Unitarianism. At first the reformation was chiefly moral. First went indulgences and prayers to the saints. Then the miraculous sacrifice of the Mass was changed back towards the simple commemoration of the Lord's Supper. Then came the question of God and Christ; and some began to notice how different was the language of the Creeds about the Trinity from Chirst's own simple way of speaking of the Heavenly Father. Once that question opened, there was no closing it again. From that day, the old truth of the simple Unity of God has been struggling upwards; and, in spite of all persecution, has been winning an ever-widening way. There was nothing like organized Unitarianism at first. It was just the private heresy of a few daring thinkers. They had no party. One of the first indications we have of some thinking that way is through finding an aged woman, Katharine Weygel, burned alive at Cracow in 1539, at the age of eighty, for Unitarian opinions. She was a reading woman, and could not find any Trinity in the Bible,—and she said so, freely. Then her Catholic neighbours began to say that she was turning Jew, and even at her great age she was condemned to suffer. And so others died the martyr's death here and

there for the same cause. Then a little later we find Unitarianism beginning to be more distinctly developed, and promulgated by some of the wandering students and teachers of the time. Such an one was the well-known Servetus—the Spaniard—who being caught up out of his legal studies by the ardour of the Reformation, studied the Bible, came to the conclusion that primitive Christianity had no Trinity in it, wrote his great work, 'The Restoration of Christianity,' to prove this to the world; and, after incensing Calvin and the other Reformation-leaders by his pertinacious arguments, was at length—in 1553—burned by John Calvin at Geneva, and afterwards in effigy by the Catholics at Vienne.

Unitarianism in Poland.

The first organised church in Europe, rejecting the Trinity, was in Poland. In the middle of the sixteenth century, Poland was one of the foremost countries of Europe, and one in which there was entire religious liberty. So here many wandering, persecuted Unitarians found a refuge, and drew many of all classes to their belief. Unitarian churches sprang up all over the country. At Racow they had a great college, with sometimes a thousand students. Even Catholics sent their sons there, because the education was so good, and already these Unitarians had won the reputation of not interfering with their students by religious proselytizing. Meanwhile, close by Poland, there was growing up the strong sister Unitarian church of

Transylvania and Hungary.

It was in 1564 that a movement against the doctrine of the Trinity arose in Transylvania, and so rapidly did it spread that within one generation Unitarianism had

about four hundred churches in Transylvania, with thirty-seven in Hungary, and a great college at Klausenburg; and there in the heart of Europe it looked for a time as if the fuller Reformation was beginning, which should take the world back to the Christianity of Christ.

But it was only for a little while. The vast strength of Europe was either intolerantly Catholic, or almost as intolerantly Calvinist or Lutheran. This Unitarianism in Poland and Hungary really depended upon two enlightened Protestant kings. These died in 1571 and 1572, and in each country the next ruler was a Catholic, and at once the Unitarian churches began to suffer. They were so strong that they struggled on, and for a time found powerful protection; but gradually they lost ground. In 1638, in Poland, their college was destroyed, its teachers banished, the Unitarian churches closed. It was terrible; but Catholics and Calvinists were joining hands, and the orthodox Protestantism of Europe was glad to see the Unitarians crushed. At last, in 1658, all Unitarians were banished. They were given three years to leave the country. They petitioned for longer time, and the three years were changed into two! Thus finally, in 1660, the Unitarians were all driven from Poland; it was made death to profess their doctrines or to shelter their persons; and Unitarianism in Poland, after existing for just a century, was utterly crushed out.

The wonder is that it did not perish as completely in Transylvania. There, too, the Catholic rulers, the Hapsburgs, tried every kind of repression. But the hardy Szekler peasantry held to their faith. Their numbers diminished indeed. The thirty-seven congregations in Hungary entirely disappeared. The four hundred churches in Transylvania dwindled to one hundred. Yet still they held together, generation after generation, yes, century after century. The last effort to crush them occurred as late as 1857, when Austria had just made a new concordat with Rome. But with the help of their

fellow-believers in England, they survived that attack also; and now in the freer atmosphere of a regenerate Austro-Hungary, they, with their Bishop at their head, are growing stronger continually, still keeping alight that lamp of truth first kindled at the fire which burned Servetus.

Unitarianism in England.

Here, also, the story of Unitarianism is one which begins from the earliest times of the Reformation, though it was for a long time only the story of struggling and isolated heretics. The sixteenth century is dotted over with the names of Unitarian martyrs. The last persons put to death for religion in England were two who were burned for Unitarianism in 1612. But flames could not put into the New Testament anything but the old simple doctrine of One Almighty God, and Christ a great holy teacher, but not God. The Latin treatises and catechisms of the Polish Unitarians were smuggled into England and widely read. All through the Puritan struggle of the seventeenth century there was a strong under-current of Unitarian thought. It was held by some of the greatest minds of the age—such as John Milton, John Locke, and Sir Isaac Newton. It was not organized into a Church. It could not be. But it kept spreading, and when in the next century some congregations openly took the name, it was not as anything new.

Of the body of churches now commonly known as Unitarian, the first to take the name was established in 1774 by Theophilus Lindsey, Vicar of Catterick, in Yorkshire, who, having become convinced that Unitarianism is the doctrine of the Bible, gave up his living, and coming to London, opened Essex Street Chapel.[1] But the great

[1] Since removed to Essex Church, Kensington, Lindsey's Chapel being converted into Essex Hall.

leader of the movement towards the open avowal of Unitarian belief was Dr. Joseph Priestley, and it took place among the English Presbyterians. These English Presbyterians—an entirely distinct body from the Calvinistic Presbyterians of Scotland—though they were originally very much the same in doctrine as the other Nonconformists, gradually became less willing to set up, or submit to, any formal statements of doctrine. When the "Act of Toleration" (1689) enabled them to build chapels, they left their Trust deeds "open," not tying them down to the doctrines of their founders. They did this with their eyes open. They were mostly orthodox themselves, but there was free inquiry in the air, and they would not tie down their descendants, but left them free to worship as they might find truest. The consequence was that those descendants became gradually broader in their thought. There was no sudden change of position, but the old points of oxthodoxy were less and less insisted on, and they fell back more and more on the simple teachings of the Gospels. It was Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestley who aroused them to the perception that this simpler Christianity to which they had come was, in fact, *Unitarianism*, and who showed them its real importance, and led them to avow it and spread it. They did not indeed take the name; they disliked sect names altogether. They continued, for the most part, to call themselves "Presbyterians," and some do so still. But as a matter of fact, they have come to be commonly known as "Unitarians," and there has been no shrinking from the avowal of the great truths which that name denotes. *Only, they are careful to maintain the freedom which has led them to those truths, as well as to bear witness for the truths themselves.* So, while the name "Unitarian" is commonly adopted as describing their general position, they have always shrunk from permanently labelling their churches by that name, feeling it their duty to preserve them and hand them on

in the same freedom in which they received them. This shrinking from a sectarian position, this feeling that they are really not setting up any new doctrine of their own, but simply reverting to the Christianity of Jesus Christ, has in some ways hindered them from propagandist action, and indeed it was not till 1813 that the penal laws against Unitarianism were finally repealed; so that their progress has been slow. But it has gone steadily on.

A movement very similar to that among the English Presbyterians took place also among the General Baptists; and a still more important liberal movement among the Irish Presbyterians in the first quarter of the last century led to the secession of a considerable number of congregations which formed themselves into Non-subscribing Presbyteries. All these are usually classed with Unitarians, being included in a common Year Book, and generally acting all together in Conferences and Associations. The total number of these Unitarian and allied Free churches is about three hundred and sixty, of which some twenty-five are in London.

Unitarianism in America.

The story of Unitarianism in the United States is very much the same as in England. The Massachusetts colonists were Congregationalists, and Congregationalism, in its most rigidly orthodox and Calvinistic form, became the "established church" of that state. But the whole atmosphere of colonial life was that of freedom, and it could not be kept out of religious thought. As early as 1785 one of the Boston churches became openly Unitarian, and at the beginning of the present century one congregation after another began to declare for freer thought. It was Dr. Channing who became known as the leader of this new Reformation, and whose preaching of it was so fervent that about half the churches in Massa-

chusetts accepted Unitarianism, and it numbered among its adherents many statesmen, writers and thinkers, eminent throughout the world. Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, Charles Sumner, Horace Greeley, Horace Mann, Governor Andrew; the poets Longfellow, Bryant, Lowell; Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louisa M. Alcott, Bayard Taylor;—these are but a few of those who might be named.

Moreover, in addition to those American churches which are distinctly enrolled in the Unitarian fellowship, there is the whole Universalist body, with about a thousand churches, which also holds Unitarian doctrine, though laying its special emphasis on the doctrine of universal salvation. The distinctly Unitarian churches number about five hundred—Boston alone having thirty of them, a larger number than any other religious body.

Ecclesiastical Constitution.

It may be interesting to add some details about church government and ordinances among the different Unitarian bodies. In all such matters there is great freedom among us. The Unitarian church in Transylvania is "Episcopal," having had Bishops at its head since its formation in the Reformation time. In England and America, on the other hand, the Unitarian churches are strictly Congregational, each congregation entirely independent in its ecclesiastical arrangements, only united in various voluntary associations. In Ireland, again, their church government is by Presbytery.

Baptism (or the dedication of children), and the Communion of the Lord's Supper (as a reverent commemoration of Christ) are commonly observed among Unitarians, though in no sense obligatory. Some, however, object to all such ordinances, much as do the Society of Friends. It should be noted, however, that the Communion is, among us, not a sign of church-

membership, but entirely open to all, whether of our own church, or outsiders who are willing to unite in it.

The theological schools from which these liberal churches mainly draw their ministers are three, viz:—"Manchester College," Oxford, founded in Manchester, 1786, which has from the first adhered to its "original principle of freely imparting theological knowledge, without insisting on the adoption of particular theological doctrines"; the "Unitarian Home Missionary College," founded in 1854, and located in Manchester; and the "Presbyterian College," Carmarthen, a survival of the time when the English Presbyterians and the Congregationalists were united; it still continues unsectarian, both Unitarian and Orthodox students studying together, and under professors drawn from both sides.

The working centre of the Unitarian churches is the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, which has its headquarters at Essex Hall, Essex Street, Strand.

There is also a "National Conference," established in 1882, and meeting once in three years. Its full name is the "National Conference of Unitarian, Liberal Christian, Free Christian, Presbyterian and other Non-subscribing or Kindred Congregations."

The "Forward Movement" in Theology.

In conclusion, while thus setting forth the story of this great movement of religious thought towards the simple Christianity of the Gospels, as it has worked out in connection with the distinctly Unitarian Churches, we would utterly disclaim the idea that it has been confined to these. There are great liberal movements in France, Holland, Germany, and Switzerland, which, while not taking any specifically theological name, are in general agreement and hold friendly fellowship with Unitarians. In England, also, there are broad thinkers in the ministry

of almost every orthodox denomination, who, if not formally giving up the old doctrines of the Trinity and the other corruptions to which it led, are yet preaching essentially the same simple spiritual thoughts of God and Christ, and of Man and the Eternal Hope, for which Unitarians specially stand, but for which we have so long had to stand alone. Among the members of such churches we believe that these simpler views prevail even far more widely. It is often said that there are many more Unitarians in other churches than there are in our own. We are thankful if it is so. We rejoice in every movement of thought towards the truth, under whatever name. But still it must be remembered that in the Churches from which these individual liberal voices come, and in which these thousands of more liberal thinkers worship, the old creeds are still read, the old doctrines are still maintained. Plain people are puzzled when they hear one doctrine in the sermon, and quite another solemnly professed in the creed, or uttered in the prayers. Many turn away from Christianity perplexed, disheartened. Unitarians desire to turn them back to it again. We believe that the time is ripe for a more clear and open proclamation of the truth; and that there are many who, if they would but look carefully into the matter, would find the religion of Christ a nobler, simpler, and more reasonable thing than it is often represented; and would welcome a Church which, while openly standing for the best truth that has yet appeared, stands also for that full liberty of thought which is the best condition for receiving whatever of new truth God may yet have to unfold.

LECTURES.

THE OLD AND THE NEW THOUGHT OF THE BIBLE.

I AM asked to give some brief, simple statements of the religious thought and faith commonly held by Unitarians. We have entitled the whole course, "The forward movement in religious thought as interpreted by Unitarians." There has been a good deal heard about "Forward Movements" of late, till some people feel as if they were getting rather tired of the phrase. But it is a good phrase, and it stands for a good thing. There has been much awakening in the present day among all Churches. I cannot help tracing it, in large measure, to the closer study of Jesus Christ. The simple, human life of Jesus Christ, just as it is told for us in the Gospels, has been studied for a generation past as, I think, never before. In most of the Reformation types of Protestantism the weight of interest and attention was put upon the Epistles, and on Paul; but now the thought is of Christ.

And that is a wonderfully good sign. Here is the root of all this "Forward Movement." It has sent the churches out with a new impulse of helpful love to all sorts of missionary work, both abroad and at home. And honour to them for it. But, at the same time, we do not think the movement for spreading Christianity more widely is all that is needed. Almost equally needed, is the forward movement in thought. A great deal of the alienation of people from churches, arises, we cannot help believing, from the strange and unreasonable doctrines which have been taught as Christianity. Many, in other Churches besides ours, have felt something of this. Even those Churches which most profess to stand immovably on the old lines have really gone forward. Hardly any of them put things as they used to do. But then, here is the point: they seem to go forward reluctantly. They touch the newer thought as if they were afraid of it. They try to make out that they really are about where Calvin was, or Anselm, or the Westminster divines. And all this newer, brighter, more reasonable faith to which thoughtful students have been coming of late years deserves something better than this timid, hesitating treatment. So, this forward movement needs to be interpreted not by those who are afraid of it, but by those who are not afraid of it; by those who have always believed that there should be some going forward, and who, instead of looking away from it, have all along frankly faced it.

That is why we ask the attention of our fellow-Christians to the forward movement in religious thought as "interpreted by Unitarians."

Unitarianism began in a forward movement. It has always stood for free, reverent thought; and so it came, generations ago, to the very positions to which others are now gradually and hesitatingly feeling their way. And we desire to set these things before the world in the plainest way we can. I can, indeed, only give you general statements on all these subjects, because in our churches we do not have any definite, formal creeds or articles. We do not regard Religion as a matter which can be shaped into precise or binding definitions. Still, as a fact, there are certain broad views of Religion, to which our fathers and we have gradually come by the very fact of our not being tied down to specified creeds; and while we still hold these thoughts open to any further or clearer truth, we are really quite as well agreed upon them as churches which profess some exact uniformity, are, to the views which they hold.

My first subject is the Bible. It is well to speak of this first, because, in each of these lectures, I shall have constantly to refer to it and quote it, and it is well to start with a clear idea of why we refer to the Bible, and in what sense we quote it. And here, at the very outset, is a very clear distinction between the thought of the Bible which used to prevail, and which is still more or less rigidly upheld

in most churches,—the *old* thought, I may call it,—and what I may call the *new* thought, to which some of the best scholars in other churches are more and more coming, but to which we have long come, and which we may be said distinctly to stand for. The old view, as you know, was simply, that of what was called Plenary Inspiration. The Bible was regarded as, every word, from Genesis to Revelation, the very words of God; not merely "The word of God" in the broad sense of being the gradual utterance of His truth to the world—that I should agree with—but God's very words, dictated by His spirit, and so, everything on every subject, to be accepted as absolute and perfect,—infallible truth. Does it say that Noah's ark held two of every kind of beast and bird in the whole world,—then it must have been so, though really there are two different accounts of that matter—one, specifying seven of the clean, and two of the unclean. Does it say that the sun and moon "stood still," then it was held impious to doubt it. Does it say that God commanded Moses to slaughter the Canaanites—men, women, and even children—every soul, in whole cities of ten or twenty thousand people—then God must have commanded so, and it must have been right. That was the old view of the Bible; and there are many who still uphold it. Again and again, we hear the cry: "You must take the Bible, all or none!"

But there is a new view which has gradually been coming to the front. It has been seen that

such a claim as that of every word of all the Bible books being inspired and infallible, will not bear really looking into. The Bible itself nowhere makes any such claim for itself. Indeed it is not one book at all, but a whole library of books—the remains of the ancient Hebrew and early Christian literatures—sixty-six different volumes or works, of many of which the very authors are unknown, and written at intervals along a thousand years. And these different books are of very various character and value; some, indeed, the very holiest and even divinest works in which the spirit of God has ever enlightened the mind of man; others, just ancient histories, ancient traditions, war-songs, love-songs, laws, proverbs,—some of them of very little religious interest, and which it is impossible for any thoughtful student to regard as infallible or divine. This new view of the Bible starts, then, with the fact that it is thus a collection of ancient books, which contain indeed among them the very divinest help to religious truth, and through which, as a whole, God's gradual revealing of Himself has come,—but which yet have been written and composed, and handed down, and sometimes altered and pieced together, like other ancient books. So that the whole is to be studied thoughtfully and earnestly, in order to distinguish between the divine thought gradually shaping itself in the hearts of those far-off centuries, and, the mere vehicle of laws and songs and histories in which that divine

thought gradually took shape and was handed down.

That is the new thought of the Bible; and something of it is beginning to spread in all Churches. The best scholars, everywhere, and the more liberal ministers, are beginning to acknowledge, when you put it to them, that you cannot take *everything* in the Bible as equally divine, that there is a human element in it, and so forth; and still, what I am struck with is, how timidly they take hold of this new thought, how afraid they seem of admitting, straight out, that there can be any real error or imperfection in it. They will admit this if you talk to them about difficulties that you find, but how few will say so in their pulpits, or in their Bible-classes; and really study it, and urge their people to study it, in this new way.

Now, this new view, which others are touching so timidly, is what we Unitarians have long openly maintained. We do not just *admit* it, here and there, when we are pressed with some difficulty; we say it is the only true way of looking at the Bible, the only way really to get at the heart of divine life and meaning in it. We do not try to keep as close as possible to the old idea of the Bible as all inspired, as if that would be the best idea of it, if it could only be kept up. We say plainly, that that old idea was altogether a mistake, and has done—and always will do, so long as people try to maintain it—a great deal of mischief. We say that

to claim for the Bible that it is all inspired, is like trying to rest a pyramid on its point instead of on its base. It is resting its title to human reverence, not on the broad fact of the divinest and noblest things in it, but on the possibility of defending even the most incredible things in it. Now the Bible does not rest on any such narrow point as that. What it rests upon is really this: that here among these books, however mixed with merely human elements and old-world errors and imperfections, we have had preserved for us the world's noblest thoughts of duty and religion—thoughts which in their slow unfolding and growth, as we watch them shaping themselves into law and worship and life, and climbing upwards through the ages, we feel to be not mere accidents of history, but providential steps in a divine meaning and evolution,—in the true sense, God's gradual revelation of Himself in man. It is not, indeed, in the Bible only, nor only among the Hebrews. "That is the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." We are coming, in the light of truer knowledge of other ancient races, to see that God's light was, in some measure, everywhere, but nowhere *so* clear and strong as in Israel. Yes, that religion of the Bible—that religion which comes out in lives and histories and psalms and prophecies and parables and great strong words of holy wisdom, all culminating in Jesus Christ—forms, altogether, a broad, immovable foundation, on which the noblest religion of

mankind has actually builded, and on which it still rests secure. It is "a heavenly treasure," but it comes to us in "earthen vessels." We have in it the gradual unfolding of the divine thought, as it expressed itself in the holiest thoughts of men; but, the *record* of it all is simply human; it comes to us through stories, traditions, histories of the ancient world, which in many ways are only like other histories or traditions. For instance, I believe that into the heart of Abraham there came a real revelation of the one infinite God—a revelation which, however imperfect, was so real and clear to him that it led him away from his people and his country, and all their idolatries, to set up a little family, which was to grow first into a tribe and then into a nation, worshipping One Almighty God. But the story of how that truth came to him, and how he went away, and what became of his people,—*that* all comes to us through very ancient traditions, which were not even written down for centuries and centuries afterwards.

Moses, again, was inspired; in the solitudes of the Sinai desert, there came into his soul such a clear vision of God and God's law as became a great beacon light of truth and right, through all the ages after. But who wrote the story of it all, we do not even know, nor when it was written down; and, mixed up with that story of Moses, are a hundred things about the life and doings of the time which are curiously interesting, but are just part of

the earthen vessel in which the divine treasure of his holiest word and work have come down to us. Nay, not only were those who wrote about God's great teachers earthen vessels, but so were even those teachers themselves. "When God makes the prophet," said Emerson, "he does not unmake the man." The spirit of God shone into those old Hebrew souls, but it only shone in as they could receive it, and it only shone out again to men through their human nature, and often through very human words and actions.

So it is, we believe, all through the Old Testament. From the beginning, there is a golden thread of light and truth, coming out clearer and clearer, through Moses, through David, through the Psalms, through the prophets, on to Christ, the perfect light of all. But the old Hebrew life and history and literature, through which that golden thread weaves in and out, that is simply, in great part of it, like the rest of very ancient books. Why, do you realize what the Bible has had to pass through, in coming down to us? I spoke of it as not a book, but a whole literature, or rather, all that remains of it. For in dark times some of it was lost, and other parts only survived in fragments. Some six hundred years before Christ, the Jews were in exile, for a long seventy years; and, when they were allowed to return to their own land, and build up their Temple again, and have their old worship and their old law, everything that was left of their earlier

times seemed to them incalculably precious. Their ancient traditions were collected together; what were left of their old histories were carefully edited; all the psalms which had been written from David's time down were gathered into this Psalm Book; all the proverbs, beginning with collections said to have come from as far back as Solomon, were compiled into this "Book of Proverbs"; all their ancient laws were, in just the same way, massed together into what they called the "Books of Moses" their first great lawgiver. And so this whole great literature came to be a whole shelf-full of different books.

The New Testament is not so varied in character as the old; it is *all* on a uniformly higher level. The "treasure" is heavenlier and far less of the mere "earthen" in the vessels. But still the principle is the same. In Christ we have the very holiest and purest utterance of the spirit of God; but it did not need any inspiration for Matthew and Mark and Luke to write down what they had seen and heard of him, and they do not claim any. They wrote what they remembered, or what they gathered from others, with beautiful simplicity and truthfulness; but still we find them constantly remembering things a little differently—and more or less imperfectly. Then in the Acts, and the Epistles, you see the light of Christ as it passed through the minds of his disciples, and as they tried to transmit it to the world. But it is not quite as

pure and bright as the light was in him. The Epistle to the Romans is very noble, but it is not equal to the Sermon on the Mount.

I know there is one difficulty that may occur to some of you. It may be said: If the Bible is not *all* divine, how can you tell which part *is?* How can the heavenly treasure be distinguished from the earthen vessel? How can we know which part to receive, and study, and regard as Holy Scripture, and which part to put aside as mere human additions? Well, that sounds a very plausible objection, but in reality there is nothing in it. Do you need anyone to teach you the difference between an ancient jewel, and the earth that has crusted to it? Do you need anyone to teach you the difference between sour bread and sweet? That is all there is in it; our faculties may not be perfect,—far enough from that; but they are quite clear enough to shew us which are the divinest parts of the Bible, which is the real bread of life that it is good for our souls to feed upon. See how it applies: for instance,—in the Book of Joshua. That book tells about the Israelites trying to win a foothold in Canaan, and like all such stories of the ancient world, it is a pretty sanguinary story! Well, all that is just the "earthen vessel,"—warfare as merciless as that between the Anglo-Saxon invaders and the native Britons. When I read, that on Joshua taking Jericho, he "utterly destroyed all that was

in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and ass, with the sword"—*that* is no heavenly treasure! Or, when, in another battle, he calls, in his war-song, on the sun and moon to "stand still" till he could complete some tremendous slaughter; and some old writer in recording that tradition, gravely adds that the sun stood still, and so did the moon,—I do not need to begin asking the astronomers whether such a thing would be possible; it takes its place as a curious piece of old world tradition. But I look on; and find Joshua, old and stricken in years, gathering the people round him; and I find him, brave old captain, who had led them on, taking no credit to himself, but humbly ascribing it all to the goodness of God, and bidding them serve the Lord in sincerity and truth, all coming to that grand climax—"choose ye this day whom ye will serve, but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Ah, there is the golden thread, there is the heavenly treasure! That single saying, coming ringing to us from that old warlike time is something that is good, real "bread of life" for ever. Or look into the Psalms. Is there any real difficulty *there*, in telling which is the heavenly, and which is the mere earthy that has got mixed up with it? "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"—and all the rest of that beautiful twenty-third Psalm. "The heavens declare the glory of God,"—and all that uplifting burst of praise of the nineteenth Psalm. "Bless the Lord, O my soul,

and all that is within me, bless his holy name"—these on the one side; on the other, such words of cursing as come in here and there; that one hundred and ninth Psalm in which someone curses not only his enemy, but his enemy's little ones:—

"Let his days be few and his office let another take;"

"Let his children be continually vagabonds and beg;"

"Let there be none to extend mercy unto him, neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children!"

Or that other Psalm of the Captivity (cxxxvii.), beginning—

"By the waters of Babylon there we sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion,"

but ending with that terrible word—

"Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones."

Cannot we take those beautiful words, and cannot we put these curses aside? and is not it a positive relief and deliverance—not a weakening of the Bible, but a strengthening of it—to be able to put such things aside, not to have to try to excuse or defend them? Why, this thought, that everything must be divine, has been a nightmare on the heart of faith. It has made men troubled about things they read in the Bible, which they could not believe, or could not feel were right, and yet which they had to try and think of as absolutely inspired.

Put all that thought away! The fact is, that the

Bible is nothing of that kind. Its heavenliness consists not in its being all divine or equally good, but in this,—that what is good shines out in it with such transcendent brightness as to be light and help for ever. Accept that light and help! Dwell on that, feed your heart with it, walk in the light of it; and then, for the poorer, earthly element, simply let it go, pass it by, do not trouble about it!

That is the way, also, to find out what are the great truths that Christians should hold dear. Do not treat the Bible as if every word and every verse were equally true, and equally important. If you do so, you would have to search all through the whole vast Bible before you could be sure you had the truth. But it is not so. The Bible is not a religious ready-reckoner with some special verse to answer every different question that can come up. It is all interesting—it all helps to show what men have thought; but, *for the central truth, keep to the teachings of Christ himself.* Simply see what he went about preaching; see what he impressed again and again, and what he seemed most anxious for people to believe and do. There is the heart of the matter; there is the heavenliest part of all the heavenly treasure.

Here then is the divineness of the Bible, and this is the way to use it. Go to it with the clear understanding that much of it is merely old-world history; but look for that which, along that old-world history, was the golden thread of divine light

and truth, and which ever kept increasing; and then, chief of all, come to the gospel of Christ and find there the divine light and truth at their very clearest and highest. So shall the Bible shine out with ever new preciousness; that which has perplexed and puzzled men shall sink into its true subordinate place; and the Divine element shall stand out all the clearer, setting our faith upon a rock, and lifting it up into the brightest light that God has ever given to shine into this world.

THE OLD AND THE NEW FAITH IN GOD.

I THINK that Faith in God is the greatest thing of all in Religion. The soul of man has no loftier instinct than that which all over the world and all along the ages, feels the haunting presence of a meaning and life higher than man himself, and "feels after Him if haply it may find Him." Do you remember that answer of the old man in Kingsley's "Alton Locke," when some one asks him if he believes in the doctrines of the church: "I have been trying these sixty years to believe in *God*, and to find another man who believes in Him." Yes, really to believe in Him,—to feel, not with a mere intellectual assent, but as part of one's deep conviction, that over all, and in all, and through all, is not mere blind force, but Life, and Thought, and Meaning—something to which one may say "God," —surely this is about the essence of Religion.

I am not going to enter into an argument to

prove the existence of God. I do not know that it can be proved in any formal terms of logic. It is one of those convictions which have grown up among mankind, and which—even if occasionally seeming to be shaken,—always quietly comes up again. It is so now. Thirty years ago there was a widespread apprehension that Science was leaving no place for God. The Doctrine of Evolution, especially, was thought by many to be leading towards an explanation of the Universe without God. But it has been frankly faced, and looked through and through, and it does not do anything of the kind—and evidently is not going to do. Trace things back and back, as far as science, or even imagination, can reach—back to the primal fire-mist if you will—but when you think of that primal fire-mist silently growing into stellar systems, and worlds, and life, and trees, and beasts, and *man*—you may allow millions of years for it, and still you are just as much forced to think of some mysterious power within it, causing it,—as if you believed it had been all accomplished in a brief six days. I suppose that, of all living thinkers, Herbert Spencer has most resolutely groped his way towards the origin of things with this lamp of Evolution, and yet he entirely admits that we have to believe in some mysterious causing power. His clearest word about it, is, that we are ever "in the presence of an infinite and eternal Energy from which all things proceed." That is enough. I do not mean that it

is all that religion wants, but it is all that we need for Science and Philosophy to assure, in order to justify religion. For if Science, looking only at material things, can say "Infinite Energy"—Religion, feeling in the whole, elements of soul and thought and goodness that science cannot take into account, goes on confidently to say "God." It is not any logical proof of God that Science thus gives us; but it is a strong assurance at the solid base of things, that in "feeling after Him" along the old lines of religious thought, we are not stretching vain hands into mere emptiness; that if we still only touch the hem of the unknowable, that unknowable is not less than men used to mean by God,—not less, but more.

No, what is really needed, is not some proof of God; but rather to clear away from men's thoughts of God, the poor and unworthy conceptions which have grown up at times in the world, and which have come to be so identified with Faith in God, as to incline the intellect to reject the whole thing. So what I have specially to speak of, is,—"the Old, and the New Faith in God."

Let me make my meaning clear. By the new thought of God, I mean that which Christ taught to the world. "Not very new," some may say, seeing that Christ's teachings are already eighteen hundred years old, so old, that some people are inclined to treat them as already antiquated and outgrown. Yet what is eighteen hundred years, after all, in the

long development of man and of man's thought. There, through the long ages, in this land and in that, men had been groping after God. In their rude Fetishisms or Animal Worships, in their Deification of mighty heroes, in their adoration of Sun and Moon, in the exuberant Polytheism of India, in the fine Moral Dualism of Persia, you have the older faith in Gods or God—sometimes almost touching Monotheism, but never really reaching it. Above them all towers the old Hebrew thought, rude and imperfect at first, but ever growing purer as the ages passed—of the one Almighty God. And then came the great teacher, Christ, and lifted up the whole thought of God into a new spirituality and tenderness. It was not a new thought, so far as concerned what one may call its intellectual framework —it was the old Monotheism of his people—but elevated, purified, softened. It was still the teaching of One only true God, but this, brought altogether nearer to the human heart in the great teaching One God, the Heavenly Father. I do not mean that even this word was altogether new. Long before Christ, psalmist and prophet had sometimes used that name, "Father," and come very near to his thought in it. But as a matter of fact that more tender faith had long passed away. God, even to the Jews who sang that psalm that "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him"—even to them, God had become the great awful power and judge; and when Christ

stood forth with that habitual word "Heavenly Father"—it came like an entirely new uplift of tender, trustful, childlike faith.

If that simple, tender, childlike faith in which Jesus looked up, and taught his disciples to look up to the Infinite One—"my Father and your Father" as he said—if that had indeed been kept, as the great faith of Christendom—it would by now have seemed so old and settled, that we should hardly speak of it as the *new* faith in God. But the sad fact is, that that simple faith of Christ was not kept in its pure simplicity. As soon as it began to go forth among the old religions of the heathen world, even in subduing them it caught something of their corruptions. It went among the world's Polytheisms, with their manifold gods, and some coming down in visible form among men; and first the idea began to grow up that this great Christ must have been such a subordinate God in human form, and then, God equal with the Father; and then, helped by the Platonic philosophy, the old grand Unity of God was broken up, as it were, into a Trinity, in which that Divine Fatherhood that Christ bade men adore came to be regarded as but one Divine Person out of three —the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. This was the doctrine over which the schools argued and disputed to settle exactly how it might be. For still, you see, they could not let go the old idea of the Divine Unity. That was too firmly imbedded in the very foundations of Christianity, in the whole

texture of the Bible. And the controversies of the schools went drearily round and round among these thoughts of how God could be at the same time one, and three. Sometimes men explained it in one way, and sometimes in another. Sometimes they represented the three Divine Persons, as such distinct beings, that they became to common men like three separate Gods,—only, *one* in a sort of council; and then again they found refuge in the thought of one only God, but acting in three different characters and names—but this, the great Sabellian explanation, was speedily condemned as utter heresy. So the churches disputed age after age; and, oh, how far the whole Christian world thus wandered from that great thought of Christ—of One Infinite, Omnipresent Father-Spirit!

It has been from all those wanderings in the mazes of Trinitarian speculation, that the more thoughtful mind of Christendom has been struggling back, ever since it was set free to think by the Reformation. Struggling back, and yet, in a sense, struggling *on*;—for it seemed like coming to a new faith in God, so different was it from the old thought of a Divine Trinity which for twelve hundred years had held unresisted sway; and yet it was, in truth, but the taking up again of the simple faith of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, as one studies that great Reformation period it seems strange that with the Bible once more in the hands of the people, it was not at once

seen that it had no Trinity in it, that the great shining truth of the gospel was the Fatherhood of God—not of one person in God, but of the one Infinite Almighty. But it must be remembered that the Reformation was primarily a great uprising against the moral corruptions of the Papacy—the whole evil system of "Indulgences," and "Monasticism," and a celibate priesthood—and it was too much to expect, that it should not only reform *these* things, but go right on to a general revision of Christian doctrine. Indeed, here came in one strong point the Catholics made: they said, let men give up the authority of the Pope, and take to reading the Bible for themselves, and they will be all at sea even about the greatest truths of Christianity, even about the Trinity itself. The Roman Catholics have always put that very thing as one of the arguments for the necessity of an infallible church-authority. They have said, again and again: here is the very central mystery of Christian Faith,—the Trinity—and—you cannot get it out of the Bible, it was not revealed when the New Testament was written, it was only revealed through the mind of the Church, and it can only stand on the permanent authority of the Church declared through its acknowledged head, *the Pope.* Of course the Reformers vehemently denied this. They said they did *not* need the Pope to teach them the truth. It was in *the Bible.* And as the Trinity was not yet at all in question, and still held the whole field of Christian thought, they

said that it, also, was clearly in the Bible. A few texts which seemed to mean it, were, on their new principle of verbal inspiration and authority, as good as a thousand, and they set themselves for it, would not admit a doubt of it, and even persecuted those who *did* doubt, and by and by denied it, with a peculiar bitterness, as men who were not only heretics, but almost traitors. That is the explanation of that peculiar bitterness with which the new Unitarians of the Reformation time were attacked, and which made their progress so slow. Yet it is curious to see, how near, at times, the great Reformers—even Luther and Calvin themselves—came, to that simpler thought of God which had been so clouded and confused by the idea of the Trinity. Only listen to this, *e.g.*, from one of Luther's commentaries :—

"The word *Trinity* is never found in the divine records, but is only of human invention and therefore sounds altogether frigidly. Far better would it be to say 'God' than *Trinity*."

And Calvin: here is what he says in one of his theological treatises, in reference to one of the prayers which Protestantism had taken over from the older liturgies :—

"I dislike this vulgar prayer, 'Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy upon us,' as altogether savouring of barbarism. We repudiate such expressions as not only insipid, but profane."

Luther, indeed, did something more striking still.

You know, in the old Latin Bible—the "Vulgate"—the Scriptures which the Catholics used, there had always stood, unquestioned, what was called the text of "three heavenly witnesses," *I. John* v. 7. "*There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*" But when Luther was translating the Bible into German, scholars were referring back to the ancient Greek Testament, and there it was found that this text did not appear, that it was not in a single one of the old Greek manuscripts; and so, though it had always seemed the very strongest word in the Bible for the Trinity—indeed the only one which seemed to teach it unmistakably—Luther, as Erasmus had done, left it out; and in the preface to his last edition, he solemnly protested against it, as no real part of Scripture, and begged those who wished for the verse, to publish a translation of their own, but not to put it into his. But after his death, they put it in! Because—the fact was they could not spare it; for if that was left out, there was not really a word remaining in the Bible plainly teaching the Trinity. Even so near did the Reformers come, to the great fact that there is no Trinity in the Bible. But still the old habit of thought held them to it, and there were still two passages, which, if they did not distinctly teach it, seemed as if they surely meant it,—and as these are still constantly referred to, I must say a few words about them.

The one is the old form of Baptism,—baptizing "into the name, of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The other is that benediction with which Paul ends one of his Epistles: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Well, I can only say, that I, as the older Unitarians generally have done, constantly use these words, and love them—and why? Because we want it to be supposed that we hold something like the doctrine of the Trinity? No. It is the very fear of that which keeps many Unitarians from using them—not that the words ever really meant it. Of course, when the doctrine of the Trinity was creeping into the church, in the third century, the upholders of that innovation caught at such texts as these, as expressions of it, because in each of them the three terms,—Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit—occur together. But really, those three terms had been so grouped together, not as three names of God, or three God-persons, but simply as the three great truths of Christ's religion. Men always like such brief symbols, summings-up of great systems. Now-a-days, in the more ethical spirit of our age, the favourite summing-up of Christianity, is, perhaps—"The religion of love to God and love to man." In that old time, the thoughts which seemed to Christians to stand out most prominently in the Gospel, were,—the Fatherhood of God; the Sonship of Christ, which meant

their sonship also; and, the communion of the Holy Spirit—God's help and teaching in every open soul. And so they grouped these thoughts, and the words which stood for them, together. It was into these three great truths that they baptized men; it was these blessed things that they wished for each other in their greetings and benedictions. But there was never a thought of these words, as teaching a Trinity in the Being of God, until long afterwards, when the idea, coming in from quite other sources, was read into these words,—and has now been so long read into them that it is hard to get back to their old simple meaning.

That is how the Reformation brought along with it into Protestantism, this curious confusion of a Trinity, even though it had no place in the original Christianity, and even though some of the leading Reformers frankly acknowledged that the strongest text for it was an interpolation. But there were some even then, who went right on to that great simple truth which Christ had taught, but which had been so long obscured—of the simple Unity and Fatherhood of God. First lonely students whispered among their friends, that they could find no Trinity in the Bible; and, if they told it aloud, were swiftly martyred for it. Then churches grew up, publicly rejecting it,—in Poland, in Transylvania;—and in Poland were utterly crushed; and in Transylvania persecuted, but still kept their light burning. And the light sprang up in England

also; and here, too,—though having a hard struggle for it—has struggled on, and is coming, I think, to-day, to be more and more the real light in which loving Christian hearts are looking up to God, simply as the One Infinite Father-Spirit. I do not mean that the doctrine of the Trinity is being formally given up. It is not so. Churches are always slow at formally giving up anything,—indeed, there are some Churches that make quite a stand for it, and are constantly bringing it in, —can hardly sing a hymn without a closing verse about the "Three in one and one in three." But as I watch the deeper religious thought and speech of the time, I cannot help seeing that it is the great Fatherhood of God, which is both in men's hearts and on their lips, which is the strength of their trust, and the inspiration of their piety; and that in that great Fatherhood they mean the whole thought of God, with less and less idea of any separation or division in His being.

It is not only the truer study of the Bible which is bringing out this new faith in God, which really is the oldest but so long obscured. The simplifying process has been immensely helped by the study of Nature. The fact is, the mind of our time has been turning to science with a pathetic eagerness, to ask what it can find out about the innermost secret of Being, and Life, and that which causes all to be. The whole age has been seething with doubt—such doubt as has

dwarfed the old controversies of the creeds into mere impertinences. For how could men care to argue about the Trinity, when the real deep-down question has been, of there being any God, any Divine Life, at all? And *here* is the one clear thing, that whatever the ultimate force or life in Nature is, it is one. Science may doubt concerning that "infinite and eternal Energy," as Herbert Spencer terms it—whether it is *God*, but the absolutely clear thing is, that it is *One*. And that scientific truth goes to the heart of religion also. For it was the perception, as men thought, of different powers in nature which caused the belief in many gods, and it is the growing sense of the grand unity of Nature which is helping to do away with the last traces of that old-world thought as applying to God. Men have got out of thinking that it is one God who manages the seas, and another the winds; one who rules the winter, and another who cares for the summer or the harvest. Some day it will seem as curiously outgrown a thought that it is one person in the Trinity who stands for justice, and another who interposes for mercy, and a third who does the work of inspiring and sanctifying. The fact is, the whole distinction is a relic of a kind of thought about Deity which is fast becoming impossible. It is the whole great thought of God which is included in that great name in which Whittier voices his adoration: "The Eternal Goodness." It is the

same whole, undivided Power which is included in that question which stirs through the world sometimes: Is God a good God? And so even among the very attributes in which the old theology sought refuge in the thought of different persons in the Deity, the same great truth of Unity comes in; and God's mercy is but a finer justice, and His justice is a part of His larger love; and both, the outcome of one infinite wisdom and one infinite goodness, and *all* included in that one dear name, Our Father!

This is the great and newer thought which, I am persuaded, is growing in the world. It is growing, even where the old scholastic terms are still upheld and clung to. Even in churches that still profess to stand for the Trinity, it is not once in a thousand times that prayer is offered to the Trinity. In devotion such subtleties are forgotten, and the heart rises up simply in the little child's cry, "Our Father"; and when men thus pray "Our Father" it is not a third part of their thought of God that they address, but all the fulness of the Infinite being. There! What shall we say of a doctrine that men can neither find in the Bible nor take with them into prayer? Say? why say what is the fact, that that whole thought of the Trinity is a mere mist of human and half-heathen speculation, which has made our Father's face not clearer but obscurer; and that one of the greatest reforms needed on the thought-side of Christianity is to

put it utterly away. For though it may not be pressed, or elaborated as it used to be, it is a confusion held any way at all! Yes, *not* a "mystery" as is often pleaded—but a confusion and a contradiction. Mystery there is, everywhere. The very thought of God, the very thought of life, is mysterious. But this Trinity, if anyone insists on calling it a mystery, is a mystery of man's elaborating, and a mystery just where Christ came to try to make things clearer. That was the great thought in his heart, to make God clearer, nearer, more real to his little children of the earth. But how he tried to do this was, not by giving them some subtler definition of his being; not by shewing them the Trinity, but by shewing them the Father. It is in that direction we still want helping. Perhaps of all modern words about God, some of the most helpful are those of Wordsworth:

> "I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thought; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
> A motion and a spirit that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things."

Ah! when one rises to that kind of feeling, all talk of Trinities and Divine Persons is simply an

interruption and a discord. You might as well try to divide the viewless air, in which, yet, we live. As we rise into any real feeling of that Infinite presence, its tenderness and benignity seem to look into our souls, and the only word that we can bear is that old word of Christ's "Our Father!"

The Infinite Fatherhood of God! That was the thought that lifted up the world of old—that is the thought for which the heart of this age is thirsting more deeply than it knows. Oh, friends, of all sects and churches, lift up your voices with ours for this great simple Truth, which from the morning of the world was prophesied in the monotheism of Israel, and fulfilled in the revealing thought of Christ. Enthrone this truth, not as a dry formula but as a living faith; and gradually it shall draw all men nearer to each other, and all to Him, the One, the All, the Infinite Father-life. Yes,—shew us the Father and it shall suffice. We cannot do with less! We need no more!

THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPELS BROUGHT BACK.

ONE of the most important things to be done to-day, in the way of religious thought, is to revive in the world the thought, the impression of the Christ of the Gospels. Because there is not the slightest sign of any real tendency in modern life to put Christ aside, or to leave him, as it were, behind, in the march of progress. There are a few, here and there, who may regard the reverence for him as a sort of superstitious mistake. They would have what they call "pure Theism," simply the thought of God and of our personal relation to God; let religion dwell upon that, and occupy itself with expressing that—and any talk of Christ they treat as an interference, and a diversion of the mind from its true object. But if it is really Jesus Christ who has taught men the very highest and purest Theism, and whose life and word still give the best teaching of it, the human heart is likely to go on thinking of

him, and holding his hand, as it were, in those very approaches to God which he has taught, and in which he has given us such loving confidence. No; look where I may at life in its real uplifting, it still keeps "looking to Jesus." The Churches which hold that he was God, of course, are bound to look to him, and it is a good sign that they are looking more directly to him—less to abstract theology, and more to Christ—than ever before. And look away from the churches altogether; watch the seething, popular life of the time, which has little faith in churches, yet is stirring with dumb, inarticulate longings for some better life for men, some nobler society; and constantly you find some appeal to what Christ was and said as the great Friend of the toiler and the poor. Even in religions which specifically disclaim any discipleship to Christ, you find the same feeling of deep and most significant reverence. Mohammed himself, while bitterly attacking the idea that the "Son of Mary" was God, always spoke of Christ as the very greatest of the prophets, though in the long conflict of Islam with Christendom this has been almost forgotten. The leaders of the Brahmo Samaj of India, also, can find no life or example to illustrate their pure Theistic teaching, like that of Christ. Thus, it becomes of the very first importance to bring out just as clearly and vividly as may be what that Christ-life really was, so that its light may shine out, as nearly as possible with the purity and power with which it

shone on those who actually listened to his voice and looked into his very face.

This is why we emphasize "the Christ of the Gospels." In the Gospels we get back, the very closest that we can, to the Saviour as he actually lived and taught amongst men. But perhaps you would say, Why talk of bringing the Christ of the Gospels *back?* Surely we have him already. All Churches have him. Do they not all read the Gospels and believe in them? But here comes in the distinction which has to be kept in mind. The fact is that that holy and beautiful life which Christ actually lived has been overlaid by the speculations and doctrines of men about his nature. We are quite aware that those speculations and doctrines arose out of men's desire to glorify him, or to make his glory more clear and unmistakable among Christians; but, all the same, the real effect has been to raise up before the human mind a great, glorified image, quite different from anything those fishermen and lakeside folk of Galilee really saw when Jesus was going about preaching among them. It is as if there had been an old, old picture, remaining from that very time, of Jesus sitting, say, on some rising ground by the wayside, teaching the people; and, in after ages, those who had the care of that picture thought it did not sufficiently express his real greatness. So, in touching it up from time to time, they first put a crown upon his lowly head; and then a sceptre in his hand; and then painted

clouds of glory all about him; and, instead of the listening people, substituted crowds of adoring angels; and, at last, so that there might be no mistake, had painted in great letters over his head, "This is *God*." Well, their ideas might be perfectly true, and still I can imagine a day coming when people might begin to say: We want that ancient picture restored just as it was to begin with. We want to look into that face, just as Matthew saw it when it so took hold of him that he left all and followed him, and became a new man. I can imagine people saying that, and setting to work to try to get all those additions rubbed off. They do that sometimes with ancient pictures; and sometimes it happens that all the later work comes off together, and you have the original portrait. That is just what men are longing for to-day with regard to Christ. And it is what they may have, if they will put away all the later speculations and explanations of men as to what they have judged that Christ must have been, all the Christologies by which they have tried to define and establish his glory, and simply turn to the picture of the Gospels. Only, thank God, it is not one picture alone, but a hundred pictures, just as they came fresh from the living memory of those who walked with Jesus that brief year or two, or who treasured up what they told with a reverence which would not willingly forget a word.

It was just in that way that the original image of

Christ, as it was portrayed in the Gospels, was overlaid by the explanations and glorifications of the creeds. It is very curious to trace the process in the different statements about Christ which were gradually elaborated and insisted on. You see, the very object was to single out those points which must be regarded as most important for people to believe. They did not intend to add anything to the Gospels—at least, not at first—but only to bring out those more important points and put them so that there should be no mistake, and keep them constantly and prominently in view. The earliest of these statements is what is called "the Apostles' Creed." Nobody, indeed, now contends that the Apostles actually drew it up, but it is very ancient, and the simplest of all. This is what it says about Christ: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Well, supposing it were all true, what a dry little skeleton it is! There is no touch of Christ's spirit in it. Why, if they had taken Christ's Beatitudes, or his two great Commandments of Love to God and Love to Man, and

set those up for churches to repeat and reaffirm their belief in, every time they came together, they would have kept nearer to some living, Christian faith. Yet this creed is the simplest of all. Indeed, here is the significant fact that the creeds kept getting more and more extended and elaborate, but in that wrong direction.

After a time, this Apostles' Creed did not seem to tell all that the Church was insisting men must believe about Christ; and so they extended it. But how? By putting in something more of spirit and life? No, but by going into more minute explanations of his nature. It was no longer sufficient to say "Jesus Christ," God's "only Son our Lord," so in the great Council of Nicæa (A.D. 325) they settled it, though only after terrible disputings, that men must believe in him *thus:* as "The only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father," and so on, the rest being very like the Apostles' Creed, of which, indeed, it was a sort of extension. But now, did that really give the world a clearer, more living thought of Christ? No; even in that very direction of defining his nature, in which it was intended to clear things up, it opened more difficulties than it closed. It only led to further discussions and fiercer disputes. At the Council of Constantinople, sixty years later, the Creed of Nicæa had to be still

further extended by a decree affirming that the Holy Ghost also must be regarded as a distinct Divine Being, thus completing the scheme of the Trinity. Then this, again, only set men off on new controversies, resulting in the still more elaborate statement, called the Athanasian Creed—not, indeed, that Athanasius wrote it, but because it was affirmed to be what he had really meant. This was the most abstruse and intricate statement of all, and, at the same time, it was the most positive. The earlier creeds had simply been worded, "I believe" thus and so; but this went on to say that unless a man believed it, "without doubt he should perish everlastingly." You see, the further men went in this direction of explaining and defining Christ's glory, the smaller became the distinctions they thought they saw, and the more important they fancied them. For they were in deadly earnest about these questions of how exactly Christ was to be regarded. Mobs shouted the dogmas in the streets; workmen quarrelled over them at their work. "Every corner and alley of Constantinople," says a writer of the time, "was full of these discussions," and the very bread-sellers or bathmen could not serve their customers without asking whether they believed that "the Son was subordinate to the Father," or laying down the law about "generated and ungenerated Being." Yes, they were terribly in earnest, but the point is that the whole direction of their looking was wrong. Even when these

questions had life, it was of a poor, misleading sort; but as they ceased to have any living meaning, the creeds in which they left their record, and which men still continued to hold up before the world, became not a help, but a hindrance, mere glittering screens of words that set men looking in a wrong direction and showed them nothing. Yet all through the ages since, men have been kept looking in the same wrong direction, not at what Christ said, or how he actually lived among men, but at these great doctrines which it was thought had been established about his nature. It is these which the great Churches have specially held up before the world. True, they have never quite let go the old Gospel story of Jesus of Nazareth going about doing good, and drawing to him the sinful and the poor; but that which they have specially insisted upon has been all this divine image which has been raised up, these great dogmas about his nature. So that, throughout the ages, if the question has come up whether a man has believed in Christ, it has not meant: Does he read the Gospels and feel their truth and beauty, and love them and try to live by them; but, does he believe that the Jesus of whom they tell was God?

I believe a better time is coming. I think that a feeling is growing in the world that all that kind of questioning has somehow led the world away from Christ as he actually lived among men. There is a marked endeavour in our age to get back behind

the creeds, to the very Christ-life just as it was lived. You see one phase of it in books like "Ecce Homo," and Thomas Hughes's "Manliness of Christ." You see another in the New Criticism, which has been trying so eagerly, not to destroy the Gospels, but to find out their real character and value, and how and when they came to be written. It is not in our Unitarian churches alone that this study is going on; we gladly own the work that great thoughtful scholars in various quarters are doing for it. But how is their work received? You know the distrust, the jealousy, which all such work awakens in the average churches; how anyone who points out the discrepancies in the Gospels, tending to show them not as infallible and inspired records, but as works of honest, loving, human memory, with possibilities of error here and there, are denounced as trying to destroy the Gospels; how those, *e.g.*, who come to the conclusion that John did not write the Fourth Gospel (even though they may believe, as I do, that it was written by those among whom he taught, from their recollection of his teaching—the Gospel, therefore, "according to" John), are looked upon as dangerous people. So here comes in our work. We have always pleaded for bringing back the Christ of the Gospels to the forefront of Christian thought, and urged the fullest examination of the Gospels in order to come closer to that great life of which they tell. To get back to the real Christ, with whom this wonderful

new epoch for mankind began; to put that life, just as he lived it among his people, in its true place in the reverence of mankind—this seems to us one of the chief things Christ's churches should be for, and this is why we so emphasize the Christ of the Gospels "brought back."

Let us, then, turn for a moment from all these thoughts about what men have come to by their attempts to define Christ in creeds, and recall how it is that he appears to us in the Gospels. What a difference there is even at the very first sight. That which the Gospels are full of is, simply, a life. If you only read them casually, still it is a very distinct impression that they make—the impression of a life, humble in its outward appearance, just a lowly man of the people, but uplifted with a wonderful sense of authority in the consciousness of God's present Spirit with him; and with something in his life and word and look that drew multitudes about him, and produced upon some such an effect that they became his missionaries and apostles, and spread his teachings, life, and influence through the world. It was this Christ-life, just as he lived it there, which really wrought the change in them and through them on the world. And it is in looking at this life and studying it until it grows into a part of our very thought, and we believe in it and love it, that its blessed saving power comes home to us as to those who actually behold it.

When you do this, when you look earnestly into

the Gospels, all the features of that Christ-life keep taking form more and more vividly. You see that curious old-world time; and the Jews, with their long-growing Messianic hope, passionately looking for a leader from God; and this Jesus of Nazareth, with his great consciousness of the Divine impulse to be this leader, only in a diviner meaning than they dreamed of. "Come unto me," he cries to the eager, feverish people, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest!" And with a voice that seems to speak to all the world he proclaims the true beatitudes of man, and calls men to enter into the real, present kingdom of God. And you see how all this came out in that life at once so lofty and so humble. This is no lonely prophet in the wilderness, but one living in the throng of the world, with open eye and heart for nature and for man—for lilies and sparrows and the springing corn, for the busy women at their baking, for labouring men standing about for hire, for the fishermen mending their nets along the shore; and with some wonderful little word about them all that linked them in with God's presence and men's salvation, and which the world has never since forgotten. You see him going about with his few chosen followers; you see him stopping here and there teaching the people, opening to them his great thought of the present kingdom of God, trying to touch them with more happy trust towards the Heavenly Father, and with more pure and kind and helpful ways with one another. You see how not a

gleam of human interest in the life around escaped him. The woman who had been a sinner comes in as he rests at table in Simon the Pharisee's house, and stands behind him weeping, her heart touched as it had never been before; and Simon sees only a common sinner whom he would not have suffered to touch the hem of his garment; but Jesus sees a penitent child of the Heavenly Father, and lets her pour her ointment on his feet, and wipe them with her long hair, and bids her go in peace, for her faith hath saved her. Blind Bartimæus sits by the gates of Jericho, and through the sound of many feet he hears that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, and lifts up his voice for mercy. He might have called till he was hoarse before his neighbours would have done anything but bid him hold his peace; but Jesus stops and calls him to him. The mothers bring their little ones for a blessing, and the disciples would have sent them away: Should the Great Messiah of Israel be troubled with a lot of children coming about him! But Jesus calls them to him as tenderly as if making little children happy was the only thing he had to think of, and takes them up in his arms with a word of love which has made this world a better place for little children ever since. These are but a gleam or two of that light of love which shines out in all his life.

You may tell me that this is but one side of his life: his life as it faced towards men; and that there was another side: his life as it faced towards

God, and was uplifted by the consciousness of God. We own that loftier side of Christ's life; we find it mostly in the Fourth Gospel. We note, too, that it is that side which has seemed to men in after ages to have contained—for those who could understand—intimations of a veiled Deity incarnate in him. But to us its intimation seems quite otherwise. We love those lofty sayings of his sense of Life in God; but they do not seem to us to contain a word in the direction of his being God. No, their very preciousness is that they speak of a closeness to God, a sonship, possible to all God's children, and once in the world's history perfectly realized in the life of this well-beloved one. Does this interpretation of Christ's lofty words astonish you? But it is his own interpretation. There is not one of those lofty sayings of Jesus about his life in God, and God's life in him, which he does not also use about his disciples, to teach them also to seek the same. Does he claim, "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself"? Hear him also as he encourages his followers to look to God for the fitting word in peril, "for," he says, "It is not ye that speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." Does he speak of the spirit of the Father "dwelling" in himself? He says also to them, "He dwelleth with you and shall be in you.' Does he utter that sublimest word of all: "I and my Father are one"? Listen to him in his prayer, and you find him asking that

it may be so with his disciples too; "that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one." Do I misunderstand all this way of speaking? But it is the very way in which his own Apostles understood it all. The fact is, both he and they spoke and felt more warmly in that great joy of their new-found life with God than our more matter-of-fact age can realize. Why, what a word is that which Paul uses about Christ: "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." We colder-natured folk are inclined to say at first sight that that is a word about Jesus that never could have been said about man. And so we might have thought, only that we find the very same expression applied by Paul to the Ephesians, to whom he writes that he prays "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." No; we do not profess to be able to understand every word Christ said, to enter into all his great utterances of what he felt God to be to him, and in him. It would take a Christ fully to comprehend a Christ. But this one thing seems to stand clear in the Gospels: that whatever divineness he felt in his life he wanted all to share; that he was the "Son of Man" in the sense in which we all are; and the "Son of God"—ah! not in the poor fashion in which we are, but in that loftier fashion in which we might be.

I know that it is very startling to some to hear

Jesus thus spoken of simply as man; and yet I am convinced that that is what the Gospels more and more clearly show to those who will read them apart from the explanations and additions of after times. Even the accounts which we find at the beginning of Matthew and Luke, of the child Jesus being miraculously born; supposing you take them as history, still they do not in any way involve his being God, but only a diviner kind of man. But it is doubtful if they should be regarded as history. The earliest Gospel of all, that of Mark, has no hint of the kind; and the most significant thing is that, even in Matthew and Luke, when we come to the real narratives of Christ, as those about him saw him and knew him and personally remembered him, you find no trace of their having any idea of his having been born differently from others. He is just the "carpenter's son," and "his brethren and sisters" are there; and evidently they have none of them any idea of his being different from themselves, for Mark tells how, when they heard how he was going about preaching, "they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, 'He is beside himself'"—it seemed to them madness for him to be even talking of being "Messiah"! And so, among the disciples and among the Jews, you never find the slightest mention of any such thing. Why, so plain is this that in the next century, when the idea was growing up that, really, he had been God, one of the

points which we constantly find theologians setting themselves to explain is, why, if this were so, it had not been made known during his life. The common explanation was that which Athanasius gives—that "the Jews were so firmly persuaded that their Messiah was to be nothing more than a man like themselves, that the Apostles were obliged to use great caution in divulging the doctrine" that Christ was really God. Pass by the explanation; the significant thing is the fact so carefully explained—that that life which became so much to the world was, at the time, by those who actually beheld it, regarded simply as human. So I cannot help regarding even those half-poetical stories of miraculous birth as the growth of a later thought—the first steps in that kind of glorification which, once started, could find no halting-place until it had made him out to be God. I fall back from those later stories upon the really earlier Gospel pictures of him, as one born of good parents, in pure marriage. And then people ask if we regard him then as a mere man. "Mere man"? I hate the phrase. There ought to be no such word as "a mere man" in the mouths of those who have ever learned Christ's teaching of the living God so near to all, and waiting to dwell in every open soul. All manhood that is to be worth anything must be Man *plus* God. In Christ we have Man *plus* all of God that man's nature at its highest can receive or absorb; and still, Man—not God.

This is the Christ as we see him in the Gospels. Let those who will, rejoice in the idea that afterwards a fuller glory was disclosed. I doubt if there could have been a really higher glory. For here is the one evident thing: that that first influence, as it wrought then upon the hearts that opened to him —who only knew him as man—was the noblest, purest, intensest influence that the human heart has ever felt; and that which men afterwards called the higher glory, came, when that first and earliest faith, was not strengthening, but growing colder and weaker.

I ask you, then, to look behind that glittering but hollow image which the creeds have reared, and to bring out with new vividness and power the simple Christ of the Gospels. Keep that Life before you as the grand Christian reality. Even as a vague shadow, neglected by the great representatives of Christianity, not studied or dwelt upon, left to take its chance through ages when the Gospels were little known, yet that simple Life continued to be a power unto salvation; a rebuke to selfishness and all things false and evil; an encouragement to self-denial, and fearless holding to the right, and unresting effort for human good, and unconquerable trust in God. By its own silent power Christ's life kept on doing all this, even through ages that did not seek any such influence or cherish any such image. What might it not do, then, if men would only come to see that that

life is the very power and heart of Christianity, and to look into that life with something of that eagerness which for so long was diverted to mere creeds.

I believe that this is the spirit that is rising. Extremists may still resist it and cry out for the old creeds, and that those who do not hold them cannot be Christians; but everywhere more thoughtful people are widening to a larger sympathy with all who love Christ and try to follow him, however they may differ about the exact nature he was of. Yes, it is one of the growing endeavours of our age, to get back, behind the creeds, to the very Christ-life just as it was lived. You see it in poets, painters, scholars; and ever as men come a little nearer to it, although they may never be able to define it quite alike—or even although they may feel that it cannot be defined at all—they feel its beauty and its power, and, as in the old time, are drawn to him, and through him to God, of whom his own word was, "My Father and your Father; my God and your God."

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY—THE SALVATION OF SOCIETY.

SALVATION is one of the great words of Christianity. It was not new with the Gospel. "The Lord is my light and my salvation," sang the Psalmist—centuries before Christ, and there is no gladder or more frequent name in those old Hebrew Psalms, than "the God of our salvation." It expressed then, not any distinct theological idea, but, the happy triumphant sense of safety, whatever might come, in a righteous and trustful life with God, the sense of His being the helper of all who tried to live that godly life. Christianity simply took up the word, the best word there was to take up, and lifted it higher, gave to it an intenser moral meaning, more of the distinct thought of deliverance from sin, and so made it an intensely *present* thing, while at the same time carrying its meaning onward, further into the eternities of God, than men ever dreamed of before. But it still was

not any exact, defined, doctrinal word. It expressed a great sense of deliverance; of the freed life, raised by the power of faith in Christ out of the hold of the old, poor, sinful living, above the fear of pain or death or aught the world could do, and going on into the vast beyond, now first become to the believing heart a near and real world of endless life with God.

Alas! like so many of the great original words of Christian faith, this word "Salvation" became hardened into technical and artificial meanings which sadly dwarfed and spoiled it.

The first misuse of it was in treating it as if it were a future thing, a matter of being rescued from an endless, hopeless hell; a dread so awful that all thought of merely growing into truer, worthier life here, which is the present essence of Salvation, was eclipsed by the one overwhelming anxiety to get safely through in that last future judgment.

Then, the second misuse and perversion of the idea of Salvation, was, in regarding it as something to be done, not *in* us, but *for* us. When once men's minds got fixed on that awful doom of an endless hell, that was so tremendous that it seemed as if nothing man could do, and no mere change in man, could amount to anything in averting it; and so gradually grew up the whole stupendous doctrine of a divine ransom paid by Christ's death, and—since he was God—sufficing for the sins of the

whole world. And at first, the benefit of this was supposed to be dispensed by priests; and then, after the Reformation, all that any man had to do, in order to have his share of this substituted sacrifice, was just to believe that Christ had done this—and then, however great a sinner he had been, he might be sure of Heaven. Age after age the theologians went round and round in their arguments, as to how all this might be. They dwelt upon the inexorableness of God's justice: that it was impossible He should forgive without the full penalty of endless hell being endured, and equally impossible for man to do anything himself to escape it; they reasoned as to how, Christ being divine, his one hour's suffering of death had been a full equivalent—though of course it could not be that in him which was *God*, which died. And, really, the whole thing was a dreadful tissue of man's own perverted reasoning, and that, in presence of Christ's great teaching of the Heavenly Father waiting only for the hearts of His children to turn to Him in true repentance.

But that was how men thought they made it out, and out of all this grew the third great misuse of the word "Salvation"—in treating it as if it were a mere individual thing. The whole stress of the question of Salvation was put upon—"what must *I* do to be saved?" The world was regarded as a sinking ship, from which each one was to try to save his own soul; and for ages,

divines used to exhaust their logic in trying to prove that those who were thus saved, would not only be able to view the damnation of the rest without having their own bliss lessened, but might even find their own thankfulness enhanced by the contrast of what they had escaped from. And all this in face of the fact so plain on every page of the Gospels, that Christ's great animating thought was not of certain souls saved into some divine kingdom in the next world, but of this world saved, this world made into God's kingdom; God's will done here—"on earth as it is in heaven!" True, he said it was to begin in the individual; that is how *Salvation* always has to begin; but simply as the beginning of the whole great work, the enlisting soul by soul in the fellowship of the new life for saving the world from all its sin and evil, and bringing the kingdom of God, here and now.

I think that from all those complicated doctrines, of what has been fitly called the scheme of salvation, thoughtful people are beginning to turn away. For ourselves, I may say that we have long left it all completely behind. We repudiate the whole idea of any "scheme" of Salvation. The entire thing has been built up out of misunderstandings of some obscure sayings of Paul's, and we turn instead to the perfectly simple teachings of Christ. There it all stands clear as the sun in heaven. No averted Deity, requiring some infinite satisfaction, and only to be reconciled to His children by another

person in the Godhead suffering and dying in their stead! That Infinite Fatherhood, Christ shews us, was never turned away, never needed any reconciling; Christ pourtrays Him waiting with free, unpurchased love, for His children to repent and turn to Him. It was to turn—to reconcile—man to God, not God to man, that Christ lived and died. His whole blessed work was simply in the hearts of men, to shew them the Father, to help them to feel the awfulness of sin, to put a new striving after goodness in their hearts. It was, indeed, only the old way of salvation which had been from the beginning of the world; but Christ preached it, with a clearness that made it like a new revelation; he broke away the barriers with which priestcraft and superstition had blocked up the way to God, so that it seemed like a new way that he was opening; in a word he gave a fresh start upward to the whole moral and religious life of mankind,—and therefore, above all others we call him "the Saviour;" and all that better life to which he helps men, beginning now and going on for ever—that is Salvation!

It has been necessary for me to clear up this thought of Salvation,—as it affects the individual, in order to see it as it affects the world. In the past, it has been the salvation of the individual that has been most thought of, most pressed home to men in Christian preaching and Christian effort. But now a larger, nobler thought is growing. Men are learning, the churches are learning, Christ's

great thought of the present kingdom of God. They are contrasting the world as it is, with that nobler ideal of a kinder, juster world, which Christianity has set men thinking of and longing for. And can Christianity really help us to this kinder, juster world? It is all very well to point to it, for the salvation of the individual, but has it the power for the salvation of society? That is the question which presses in our time; that is the question which I want specially to answer now, or at least to point out where the answer lies.

To begin with, let us consider the magnitude of the problem. Indeed, who can help doing this? Each morning's paper brings us tidings of what the whole world is doing. And can any Christian heart feel content? We see the confusions and struggles of the nations,—even where there is seeming peace, the feverish expectancy of war; we see the suffering of the very poor, and the contrast of great wealth, and the antagonisms of labour, and the chasms of hopeless degradation, and the abysses of deep, volcanic discontent beneath the surface of our vaunted civilization. I do not think there is more of all this than in former times,—no, nothing like so much—but we all feel it more. It sends a sharp pain into the heart of thoughtful people. We cannot accept these things as what are for ever to be. It is hard to feel that they *are*, for a year, or even for a day. And yet—what is to be the remedy? What is to be the constructive force of a new and happier and juster world?

I do not wonder that when I claim this force for the spirit of Christ, when I put Practical Christianity as the hope for the salvation of society, it seems to some a sentimental extravagance. It seems too vague a force. These wrongs and evils which crop up in such hard, tremendous forms, must surely need—not just some better inward spirit, but some strong outward force to cope with them. So, some look for the remedy in changes of law and government; some, in the more rigid applications of political economy; some, in despair of any effective modification of existing institutions, would make a clean sweep of them in the wild revolt of Anarchism, hoping that the world would build itself anew on some nobler pattern; while, I think perhaps the strongest and eagerest look just now is, that towards some reconstruction of society on the basis of Socialism. I suppose, indeed, that perhaps the strongest opposition to my subject, as stated in the title of my lecture, would come from that quarter. Where *I* say: "*Practical Christianity—the Salvation of Society*," they would say: "*Socialism—the Salvation of Society*." [1]

[1] Some, indeed, would reconcile the two terms by the assertion "Practical Christianity *is* Socialism." They remind us how it is written in the account of the very first Christian movement (*Acts* ii. 44) that "all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their provisions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." Yes, and a very striking picture it is; but it is precisely an example not of any new Socialistic organization, but of Christian brotherhood; not an attempt at a

I am not surprised at many thus looking to Socialism. The root of the world's wrongs and miseries has seemed to lie in man thinking and striving only for himself. Surely there is enough in the world for everyone, if it could be properly shared. So it has seemed as if the beginning of some better state of things must be sought in the opposite direction to this of each taking care of self. Let society be reorganised, not on the basis of everyone getting what he wants for himself, but on that of all working for the common welfare, and all sharing from the common store. Surely, they say, life would be easier and happier so, than in the present selfish scramble. And so, from

reconstruction of society on a Socialistic basis, but simply an intense impulse of brotherliness, freely sharing its all with any one who had need. That impulse was increased by the ecstatic belief of those first days that Christ would soon return to end all earthly affairs and inaugurate a new kingdom of heaven. Filled with the excitement of this impending hope, they drew together, abandoned for the time their various labours and occupations, shared what they had with one another, and spent their days "with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house" in "gladness and singleness of heart." It was not the beginning of a new Socialistic organization at all, but simply the interim abandonment of the old world's works and cares and bnsiness, and drawing together as a great family, until the Lord should come from heaven and make all things new. And when the great dream faded, and they had again to provide for the future, they went back into their old ways of individual labour, and of each providing for himself, only with that kindlier spirit which Christ had breathed into their hearts, and which did make "all things new."

ancient times, now the dreamers, and now the agitators of the world have tried to shape this idea into theory, or to win for it some foothold in practice. I suppose the idea was never more thoughtfully and moderately held than it is to-day. There is very little that is violent or revolutionary about its methods. Indeed, a great deal of this Collectivism we hear of, has nothing really to do with the great Socialistic idea. It is merely such co-operation as men have always found useful in many things; but the very purpose of it is, to reduce the minor details of the individual self-care, not in order to lessen or weaken individualism, but rather to leave it more free in its main scope and effort. Real Socialism, however, though it may be glad to begin in these ways, is really a different thing. Even in its most peaceable and gradual advances, it does distinctly aim at the ultimate reversal of this present social order. It would, however gradually, check all the action of self-interest, all the working of rivalry and competition, the eager spirit of individual enterprise—it would regulate the action of these things, so as to prevent their bringing special profit to the individual, and would so balance the rights and claims of men by law, as to prevent selfishness being able to do much harm, and so as to make every body pretty comfortable without anyone else's help.

Well, I am not surprised that men think of all that, and dream of how it might be accomplished by

some reconstruction carried out by outward law. Compared with this, the leavening of society from within, by higher, kinder motives—tempering the struggle for self by the spirit of helpfulness and brotherhood—must necessarily seem a vague, ineffective idea. For, from the beginning, Christianity has accepted the individualist basis and framework of the world, and pleaded that the true salvation is within—a juster, kinder spirit at the heart of life. It has preached this gospel to men under every form of government, and often of misgovernment—despotism and freedom, monarchy and republicanism—and I do not mean that it has not inspired men to try to have what has been wrong put right, but its great message has been "The kingdom of God is within." It has taken society in all its inequalities of power, of strength, of wisdom, of possessions—and still its essential message has been not that of any outward equalizing, either by force or by law, but of brotherly sharing, the strong to help the weak, the wise to help the ignorant, all men to hold whatever they have or are, not just for themselves, but for the good of others and the world as well. No! Proudhon's point was "*Property is theft.*" And Socialism regards it as essentially a *mistake*, even though it may hesitate to call it *theft*. Christ's point, urged in many a parable and precept, is, *Property is a trust.* Between those two ideas is a difference as wide as the ocean. Let men feel that—strength, genius, and wealth as well, a trust—and

the bitterness of the world's inequalities will pass away, and, instead, they will become the very opportunity and incentives to mutual helpfulness and brotherhood.

You may be inclined to say: all this idea of Christianity moulding and changing life from within is very beautiful, but is it possible? That seems the weak side of it, when it is proposed to regard Christianity as the salvation, or even as any considerable factor in the salvation, of society. It looks so vague a factor, so unsubstantial. It seems to be only like saying that the real remedy against quarrelling is to be friendly. True; and yet, after all, is not that about *so*? Is there really any other way? If people's lives touch, and they are closely associated together, is there any boundary line you can draw between their respective rights and duties that can keep them from disagreeing and disputing? I have no faith that any laws can be devised which can prevent the strong from pushing the weak to the wall, if they want to do; nothing can, but putting a different spirit into them. So—vague, slow, impalpable as the spirit of Christianity may seem—I am persuaded that it is, after all, the only real healing for the warring, struggling, suffering world.

There is one special point to be noted in considering the apparent vagueness and slowness of Christianity, as the redeeming power for society. It is slow, but it does not go back; it does not contra-

dict the past of man's development; it leaves untouched what must be left untouched, what lies at the root of both individual and social progress—man's individuality and self-dependence and enterprise. I have been very much struck, in reading that recent work of Benjamin Kidd on "Social Evolution," with the force with which he brings out the necessity of this. He fully admits the hardship and suffering which are the shady side of what evolutionists have named the struggle for existence; but he shows that, all the same, it is that struggle for existence which has developed man's powers and raised him from the savage to the civilized man. And he puts it very strongly that if the human race is to keep on progressing, that struggle must continue; and that, however we may try to lessen the suffering of those who are left behind in it, it would be fatal to the forward growth of humanity to try to abolish the struggle itself. That seems to me the deep mistake of the whole socialistic idea of life, that it treats, as something to be done away, the elements of individual enterprise and rivalry. It aims to tone down the struggle for existence into a state of comparative ease, in which all, with little of painful effort, shall have the wants of life supplied. And *that* is just how it *does* act, where it is successful. I was especially struck with this among the Shakers in America. I had friends among them, knew something of their community. A perfect *economic* success—one of the very few Socialisms

that have been so. But how about the *human* success? Why, simply, the life there seemed to me life washed out—calm and sweet, almost to inaneness, but with no zest, or fine strength, or noble passion in it, at all. So Mr. Kidd says that it is quite conceivable that Socialism might make life easier to a great many to whom it is now hard, but human nature would lose. Now Christianity leaves that element of struggle still acting.

But, then, the practical question keeps coming back. It may be said—often is said: All this talk about Christianity is well enough, only it comes to nothing. It has been talked for eighteen centuries, and still the great social problem continues, the scramble and battle of the world goes on. Christianity might do, if men would practice it, but then they will not.

Sadly too true, as to any full and perfect practical Christianity. Only, mark this, Christianity is not the only remedy that is in this same case. Will not men carry out Christianity? But they are still slower to carry out any real Socialism. Is it hard to persuade men to use their property in helpful, brotherly fashion? But it is an infinitely harder task to persuade them to merge it in any socialistic common-stock! Béranger tells how for ten years the amiable Fourier went home every day in full expectation of at last finding awaiting him the millionaire who would devote his wealth to inaugurating his communistic Phalanstéres. That

millionaire never appeared. But there is not a week passes without rich men being stirred by this sense of Christian brotherhood, and taking some notable step towards acting upon it, in this very direction of using their property for some good to their fellow-men. England and America are dotted over with noble institutions, for the helping of life in various ways—colleges, libraries, public parks, dwellings for the poor, and a hundred other things, silent memorials of how brotherhood, helpfulness, are a real working force in the world. And you find this evidenced in other things as well. It is evidenced in legislation,—in all the humaner legislation, which has made this England a different world—a better world for all to live in—from what it was even half a century ago; and it is evidenced in all the hundred-fold ways in which all through society men and women are striving to make the laws better yet, and to help them out by personal effort where they still press hardly. Of course things are far enough from what they ought to be, but in this world, in which all things change and grow but slowly, the question is: which way are they growing? And when I find that in the past fifty years pauperism has decreased by almost half, and crime by almost half, and juvenile crime by much more than half; and life is healthier and longer, and labour less severe, and education opened out to all,—and, in fact, a greater improvement made than probably ever before in any nation in the same length of time,

I cannot feel that there is any case for discouragement, or for thinking that the very framework of society is on a wrong basis and needs reconstructing. No! The old basis—of individual effort and enterprise, and only freer scope for the individual; and with so much of co-operation, and common action of the community, as experience finds useful,—that seems the best, only let this kindlier brotherhood of Christianity be more fully infused into it all. It is of no use being impatient. That was a wise word of Horace Mann's, the great educational reformer of America: "the trouble is that the Lord is not in a hurry, and I am!" I know that brotherhood is not the force yet that it might be, and that Christ longed for it to be—but I do believe that it is a stronger force to-day than ever before,—softening the antagonisms of the world and alleviating its sufferings. We do not know half that it is doing even in that keenest conflict of modern society, in the relations of capital and labour. We hear at once of every rupture in those relations, of every strike or quarrel or difficulty; we do not hear of the thousand industries which are going on peacefully year by year precisely because of this fairer, kinder, more brotherly feeling between employers and employed. And so, in more ways than are ever known, Christianity is conquering selfishness and tempering even self-interest, helping the weak to stand upon their feet, making society more kind and helpful, and keeping up the struggle against greed and

wrong, and so, in many a spot of earth, making human life a little more strong and self-reliant even in those who in the mere "struggle for existence" would perish, making all the world about us a little happier and humaner every way.

That is the salvation that the world wants, only it needs more and more of it. The natural forces of man, which have evolved society thus far—these natural forces, those of self-interest among the rest, are right, only we have to try to keep them in due proportion, the noblest forces at the head. The natural working out of life—in its competitions as well as in its co-operations—this, too, is right enough; the world's mechanism of law and institution, its respect for what each man gains and has,—is right enough,—only it all wants working with more eye to the general good. It is not any radical reconstruction that it needs, but more of those higher principles and motives which Christianity aims to supply.

"*Practical* Christianity,"—we lay stress on this. We desired to put it in the forefront of this message of our churches to the world. We do not mean to say that practical Christianity has ever been absent from the world; Christ's simple spirit of helpfulness and brotherhood kept up its influence among men, by its own beautiful intrinsic power, through long ages that made small account of it. It was *dogmatic* Christianity to which, through many a century, men looked for salvation—it was by their dogmatic

Christianity that the great Churches judged whether men were fit for their fellowship on earth or for admission into heaven. From the beginning of our Unitarian movement, while we have never shirked the question of Christian doctrine, and have tried to see it truly, and to show it—so far as we could—to others, we have always stood for practical Christianity as the one essential thing. And we have interpreted it broadly. In days when the Churches that talked most about saving men's souls, frowned on the struggles for freedom and reform, and regarded politics and social questions as merely temporal matters, doubtful for Christians to meddle with, our fathers held up these things as some of the most important parts of Christian duty. Now, thank God, a better day is come. The best men in all Churches are owning the sacredness of trying to make the present world better; and they are coming to see that it is not by their creeds that this is going to be done, but by their deeds. Practical Christianity is being more preached—and more studied—and *I think* more practised, than ever before. The whole great problem of the sin and sorrow and suffering of the world is being looked at in its light. It is making men feel the wrongs and evils of the world, as they were never felt before. We must not be impatient, because the actual changing and healing work but slowly. How many millions of years has it taken the Lord to develop this little speck among his worlds into the kingdom of man? Shall we be

impatient because it seems to take so long to lift it further into the kingdom of God? But it is coming, though so slowly. And still the Christianity of Christ, interpreted into loving, faithful, helpful life, and just, kind, equal law, is the best impulse to it, and the best guide to it,—the help of God and of man to that better time for the world, for which we long and strive and pray.

HEAVEN AND HELL—HERE AND HEREAFTER.

I HAVE no idea of attempting to go over the whole vast subject suggested by the words "Heaven" and "Hell." All the great wondering hopes of the human mind, all the things that men have thought could be made out about the life to come—the blessedness which God hath prepared for those that love Him, and the dark, lurid fears which have been projected like mighty shadows on the infinite future—all these rise up in the mind with those great solemn words. And to speak of all these things—even to speak of those which have been held by Christians, and supposed to be founded on the Bible, and to investigate the texts which have been supposed to prove them—would take a volume, rather than a lecture. But I do not propose to go into any such examination. Unitarians have always repudiated the idea of coming to the truth about the future life in any such literal

way. Simply, we hold the great broad faith in the continuity of life, that this life of ours certainly lives on, in its great personal and moral quality, with retribution in it, and surely growth and progress too; but as to the details of place and method, and just how it is all going to be, we do not even expect to know. It is not that we take the doctrines about heaven and hell that other churches have worked out, and disprove them, and then set up some other minute statements and calculations of our own. We object to that whole method. We do not believe that that kind of minute, literal information about the world to come was what Christ came to teach or had any idea of teaching. What seems to have been in his heart, was, to lift up man's whole thought and consciousness of life, so as to make immortality also a more vivid and near reality. The idea of life to come was, in itself, no new thing. Most peoples in the ancient world, long before Christ's time, believed in some future state. It seems to have been one of the primitive growths of the human mind—so that, with rare exceptions, wherever you come upon the records of ancient nations, and even in the rude burial-traces of prehistoric savage races,—you find signs of some expectation of living again. The Jews, too, believed in a future state—all but one sect, the Sadducees who were distinguished as those who said that there was "no resurrection." But then, the "resurrection" which the Jews around Christ believed in,

was to be in some infinitely distant future—some far-off "last day," so dim and far away, that it was no joy, no happy reality to them,—no help or strength to the living, no comfort to bereaved and mourning hearts. The essence of Christ's teaching was, that life is not just going to be raised again sometime, but, lives on; that when it has once risen into the higher life, there is no death, only a change, a passing-on. Then, coupled with this, was his constant impressing it upon men, that that future begins where the present leaves off, takes its character from the present; that men go on thither, what they are here, only to find there the harvest of what they have sown here, and a harvest vastly greater than the sowing, as all harvests are. Thus, if here they do evil, and are hard and selfish and impure, however they may have hidden it from others, and even disguised it from themselves here, there they will find it out, and find it out in unutterable pain and woe; but if they have tried to be good and kind and true here, they will there find rest, and blessing, and happy life with God. That is Christ's teaching,—and his only teaching. He taught it in parables, just as he taught so many things in parables. And the trouble is that men have taken those parables, and his great vivid figures of speech, as if they were intended for exact and literal descriptions of the things to come. Now, that is all a mistake. The very key to Christ's great central meaning—and to that simply, without being confused with all

sorts of contradictory and perplexing details—is, to understand that those vivid pictures of warning and judgment, are parables and figures, employed to drive home the central, moral fact of a vast future, with a great joy in it and a great awe, taking its larger character of good or evil then, from men's good or evil now. Thus that scene of the great general judgment, when "all nations" shall be gathered together, is simply a parable of judgment—not a description of just how it is going to be. That story of Dives and Lazarus is another parable—every detail of the description different, shewing that the details are mere colouring; but the central truth is the same—the judgment on selfish, self-indulgent life. Then again, that tremendous passage in which Christ warns men: "If thy right hand offend thee (*i.e.*, cause thee to sin), cut it off"; or, "if thine eye cause thee to sin, pluck it out;" "for it is better for thee to enter into life with one hand"—or "one eye"—rather than having two, "to be cast into hell, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched:" that is all parable, figure, from the "cutting off the hand," down to "the worm" and "the fire." But see how the doctrine-spinners have dealt with all this. They take part as parable, but other parts they insist must be literal. Thus no one takes literally the bidding to pluck out the eye that is causing you to sin. Of course, it simply means: turn your eye away from the wrong thing. And no one has ever regarded "the worm that dieth not"

as literal. But for ages, the very next clause of the same sentence, "the fire that is not quenched," has been insisted upon literally, and has been one of the most famous proof-texts for a hell of literal fire, and for its absolutely never ceasing to burn. It has been much the same in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. The word about Dives being "tormented in this flame" has been taken as literal, but no one has ever dreamed of taking so the contrasted detail of Lazarus being "in Abraham's bosom." The fact is, it is *all* parable. And, for the most part, it was old familiar parable to Christ's hearers. It is important to remember this. That great "gathering of all nations" for judgment—that Gehenna of fire—that "great gulf," and the resting "in Abraham's bosom," were the common imagery of the time. These were not new figures of Christ's, chosen in order to teach men his own special ideas about the future world. They were simply the old framework of popular, familiar speech, used by him in order to bring out his central moral thought. That was what was new. Men talked commonly, long before Christ, of that great judgment day, and of the fiery Gehenna, and of the refuge, with kind Father Abraham; but then look how they used it all. They said, all that dividing of the sheep from the goats, and all that fiery Gehenna, were for Romans and Samaritans and Gentiles! Heaven was the future life for Jews, at least for Jews who had properly kept "the law." There was a passage

in the Talmud which said that Abraham was sitting at the gate of hell, to see that no Israelite entered. Now see where Christ's new thought came in,—not to correct the imagery, he let that stand, but entirely to alter the application of it. That great distinction of the future, which they had belittled into a sort of colour-line between Jews and Gentiles, he teaches, is really the distinction between the good and the bad. He simply took the old imagery—the fiery Gehenna, the last general judgment, the "great gulf," the awful outer darkness—but put into them his own grand teaching of the moral life, warning men of wrong-doing, and especially of selfishness as that, and that alone, which would put them in danger of those ancient terrors, and shut them out from the light and blessedness of heaven.

But perhaps some of you may hesitate at the idea of *all* these details of future life being parable and imagery. You admit that a great many are. Thoughtful people are seeing now, that the words about "fire" are figurative, though that is one of the last pieces of mistaken literalism that has been given up. But still they cannot let go the idea of some literal "heaven" and "hell"—two entirely separate worlds; that, people still almost universally cling to,—it will probably be *the last* literalism to be given up. Yet I am persuaded that the very words, heaven and hell, are themselves really parables, and parables—not of separate places or different worlds for the good and the evil, but of the

deep, wide separateness between good and evil in themselves. I do not mean that Christ definitely taught or meant to teach, that the future life of the good and the bad is not in separate places,—simply, he was not talking about localities at all, but of spiritual states; and the parables in which he impresses this infinite separateness of good and evil are just as varied in figure as those on any other matter. In some, heaven is the going in to the light and joy of a great feast—and hell is the having to stay outside, in the outer darkness. Does that sound like an altogether separate world? In the parable of Dives and Lazarus, they are within talking distance—only, with that "great gulf" between them. Exactly so; but it does not need any separate hell for that! Why, take even here a pure, kind woman, talking to some poor, lost creature, who has gone down and down in sin until she has got past all the glamour, into the torment of it. Is not that "hell," and is there not, there, the very gulf Christ figured? No. Christ was not teaching anything about places or different worlds, but only using the old familiar words and images of his time to drive home to men's hearts the deep moral of the tremendous difference between goodness and sinfulness—and how that difference comes out still more tremendously in that great life to come which follows close on this; that, in that continuing life, all kind, good life here finds unutterable blessing, all evil,

selfish life, unutterable woe. That is the real lesson. Milton touched it, more awfully than in any of his lurid pictures, when he makes the evil spirit say :

"Which way I fly is hell ! myself am hell."

And long before Milton, the Persian poet, Omar Khayam, saw the same central truth, and shaped it into words strangely suggestive :—

"I sent my soul through the invisible
Some letter of that after-life to spell ;
And by and by, my soul returned to me
And answered 'I myself am heaven and hell.'"

There is the deep basal truth which really gleams through all those parables of Christ. Only, it is a larger truth than that of "*I am* heaven and hell." Christ's mind was so possessed by the intense consciousness of man's undying life, that he sees that great truth "I am heaven and hell" projected into the vast future, and shews its larger and more awful meaning there—not just "I am heaven and hell"—but "if I go on unchanged into that future, I *shall be still more* heaven and hell." There is Christ's meaning, and I do not want to soften it down. It is an awful meaning. When you think what sin means, and how hard it is to change, and yet how so long as it is not changed, it must be more and more sad and dreadful, you cannot make the meaning too awful. Christ did mean "*heaven and hell*"; only not the cheap, spectacular "paradise" and "inferno" that theologians and poets have con-

structed out of a patchwork of his parables, but the great reality of the undying life, alike in its present and in its still greater future.

"Here *and* hereafter." Do you note how in their literalizing of Christ's parables into such entire separation of worlds and of destines, people have got clear away from the one great teaching of Christ which was not figurative, not a parable at all, but the one truth always in his mind. In separating the future life into two absolutely and eternally separate worlds, they have also had to make an absolute separation between all that future life in both its parts, and this present life. But Christ made no such distinction. Mark that word "life." It is one of Christ's greatest words. "The life is more than meat!" "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments!" "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly!" "This is life eternal," that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus thy Christ. Why, half the time when Christ speaks of *life*, you can hardly tell whether it is present life or future life to which he is referring. And the reason is, that in his mind the two were not two, but one—one great continued life, in which what men call death was no real perishing, but only a sleep, a change, a passing on. So he does not often speak of dying—it is "sleeping" or "falling asleep." And you notice that he never spoke of his own death, without the saving clause that within three days

he should be living again. This is Christ's great clear, dominating thought about life: life essentially one; and it is when we take this fully in, that all his parables about the judgment, and the great alternatives of happiness or woe, fall into their true place and relation.

Take that matter of divine judgment. What descriptive details of the entrance upon the life to come have been elaborated out of Christ's parables of judgment; and how men have been puzzled about the whole matter, by the growth of the solemn sense of law. Divine law, always working, —does that admit of any idea of a judgment day? Is not God's judgment in reality, constant, always accomplishing perfect justice in all things, if we could only see it? But what then becomes of Christ's parables of judgment, and of his emphasis —which is so clear, even if it be in parable—upon its being so awful and sorrowful a thing to pass on sinful and unrepentant into that larger life beyond?

Well, the thought of the one continuous life does not really lessen all this. God's law always *is*; God's judgment is working now. But, it does not follow that men are always conscious of it. There is a word in one of Paul's epistles which puts the whole matter in its true light, I mean that phrase in which he speaks not of "the day of judgment" but of "the day of the revelation" of judgment (*Rom.* ii. 5). The real judgment of God, the deep, moral

sequence of all action, does work itself out absolutely, as we go long. Yet none the less is it true that, often, it is not revealed at once. Much of the deepest judgment is utterly unperceived at the time. Here is a farmer who sows poor seed, and neglects his hoeing and weeding into the bargain. The judgment goes working on, every hour, but it is only when he reaps and comes to sell, that the "revelation" of the judgment comes to him. You build your wall out of the perpendicular, or with bad mortar. Probably it is "giving" a little all the time; judgment is going slowly, inexorably on, from the moment the bad work is put in. But you say, "Oh, it is a good enough wall." Some day it falls. That is *the* judgment day in that matter. But it is in the realm of the life itself that all this is most strikingly true. Something, indeed, of the judgment which is always working in life and character, as in everything else, comes out as we go along. The passions tell their tale: the muddled, bloated face of intemperance, the keen, ferret look of the covetous, the coarse, animal face of the profligate, are all revelations of judgment which do not wait for any special day. And so—for this does not work one way only—goodness of every kind reveals itself: thoughtfulness, with its look of intellect; integrity with its clear, open face; kindness, which touches the countenance with qualities that little children and dumb animals can read there, even if you and I cannot. But still, this is all only

part of the truth. The awful thing is, that there is another side even to this,—that there are great possibilities of disguise and deception in life and character—so that worthless lives are often so hidden by the trappings of wealth and rank, that they really believe themselves great; and base, grovelling souls, growing downward year by year, live on before the world with a pleased self-complacency, dully unconscious of their real position. So with Dives, in Christ's parable, with his good house, and purple and fine linen and sumptuous fare, and his five brothers and many another friend to share it all. Would he know what he was growing into? Would he ever compare himself with Lazarus, the poor, sick cripple who crawled to his door for broken meat, or could he dream that Lazarus might really be the better man? And yet it was so; and when they both die, Christ's picture is not of God judging them, and sending one to one place, and the other to another, it is of each finding himself in that state into which he has been growing through his life, and it is between those states that there is that "great gulf" fixed.

Now you see the significance of that emphasis which Christ's parables place upon judgment, in the light of that fine explanatory word of Paul's, "The day of the revelation of judgment." Says Swedenborg, in one of his deep intuitions of spiritual things: "He that is in sin, is in the punishment of sin." Yes; but here he may not know it, and there he

cannot help knowing it. Because all this earthly disguise is a thing of earth, and of the present. And as men emerge out of this earthly being, all those outward things drop away, and the life stands simply as it is, as it has grown to be; and knows itself for what it is. Then many a one who has made quite a large show on earth must stand forth such a mean, shrivelled, degraded soul, as the angels will shudder to behold. Many a one who has sinned some great sin, and managed to keep it hidden, or who has lived some lifelong lie—must then appear, in that light, just for what he is, the sin, the lie all visible—life almost *grown into that*—no momentary repentance able to change it. And, before all stretches eternity—endless reaches of life, life that there is no running away from, life that there is no forgetting, life in which though it will surely not be impossible to change, it cannot help being terribly hard—life in which only goodness, kindness, purity, love are heaven—life in which passion, greed, and lust are always hell.

Does it need images of fire, or demons, or the worm that dieth not, and some separate world made up of all such things, to make that awful? You may think over all those awful parables by which Christ tried to rouse men out of sin, and to make them feel the awfulness of it here, in the light of how they will not be able to help feeling it hereafter—there is no one of those parables too strong for that *reality*. I do not want to soften down one

of those parables; only, divest them of that hardening into which the literalism of past ages so largely changed them. All that idea of fixed, unalterable states in which through eternity there can come no change, no hope,—all that idea of a world of lost souls, for ever lost, deep in the cavernous glooms away from God—put all that away. That is no teaching of Christ's, only the strained, perversion of his teachings. With him, there is never any such definite closing of the doors of hope, as the theologians have made out. It is the beginnings of that vast beyond which he flashes on the screen; but beyond all, beyond any future to which man's thought can reach, lies still Christ's all-enfolding thought of the Fatherhood of God. So, if you want ever to penetrate beyond Christ's great warnings, take with you for your guide, not little touches from the imagery of his parables, but his great dominating thought of the wise, eternal Love! I do not say that even that will make all plain; but in all that is still perplexing, in all I cannot see, in all I cannot do, I rest in Him. As Whittier says:—

> "Father of all, thy erring child may be
> Lost to himself, but never lost to Thee!"

Yes; wherever God is, there is the power by which this world has been brought on from shapeless chaos to order, beauty, life. May we not trust Him for all life to come? There is the inspiration of all trust for the future and all effort in the

present. We want the whole bringing closer together,—heaven and hell, both of them, here and hereafter. Here in their beginnings,—veiled, often disguised, and hardly recognised beginnings—hereafter in their full, and openly revealed reality. Ah yes, we do not need to go beyond, for hell; more hells than Dante ever dreamed are here about us in this present world—some ghastly and horrible so that Christ's awfullest parables are hardly exaggerations for them; some gilded with a show of mirth or pleasure, and yet beneath, and in their secret hours, almost more dreadful.

And heaven is also, not hereafter only, but here! My old friend, Samuel J. May, our minister, a generation since, in Syracuse, New York, was once questioned by a good orthodox brother about a neighbour of them both, a lady known throughout the city for her kind and gracious life. "Do you believe that she will go to heaven?" asked the questioner. "Go to heaven?" answered my old friend, "why, she has been in heaven these fourteen years!" Yes! not only in the shining glories where the saints walk with God in white, is his heaven; but here, amid the tangle and the toil, where His saints bear many a burden, and walk the common ways of earth in the world's common garments, and oftentimes with worn and weary feet—here, too, wherever any heart is turned to God and feels the infinite love—here, too, is heaven. Only the beginning of it—and often we do not stay in it,

and only feel now and then its deep, strong blessedness. And we do not call it "heaven"—and yet it is! And in this present life, the two, the heavens and hells are mercifully all together, so that the good may conquer the evil—though alas, it conquers it so slowly. And it may be that in the greater life beyond, in which the poor beginnings of the earth are continued, it shall still be the same: one vaster world, which to the good is "heaven," and not less so because still with them are those who in the terrible remorse of wasted, evil life, feel it a "hell." And so, it may be that the noblest effort of the earthly life, the overcoming of evil and replacing hell by heaven, may also be continued there, and wrought in heavenlier fashion, and with diviner result of good than here we ever see. We know not; these things are with God.

THE END.

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